

E 312

.63

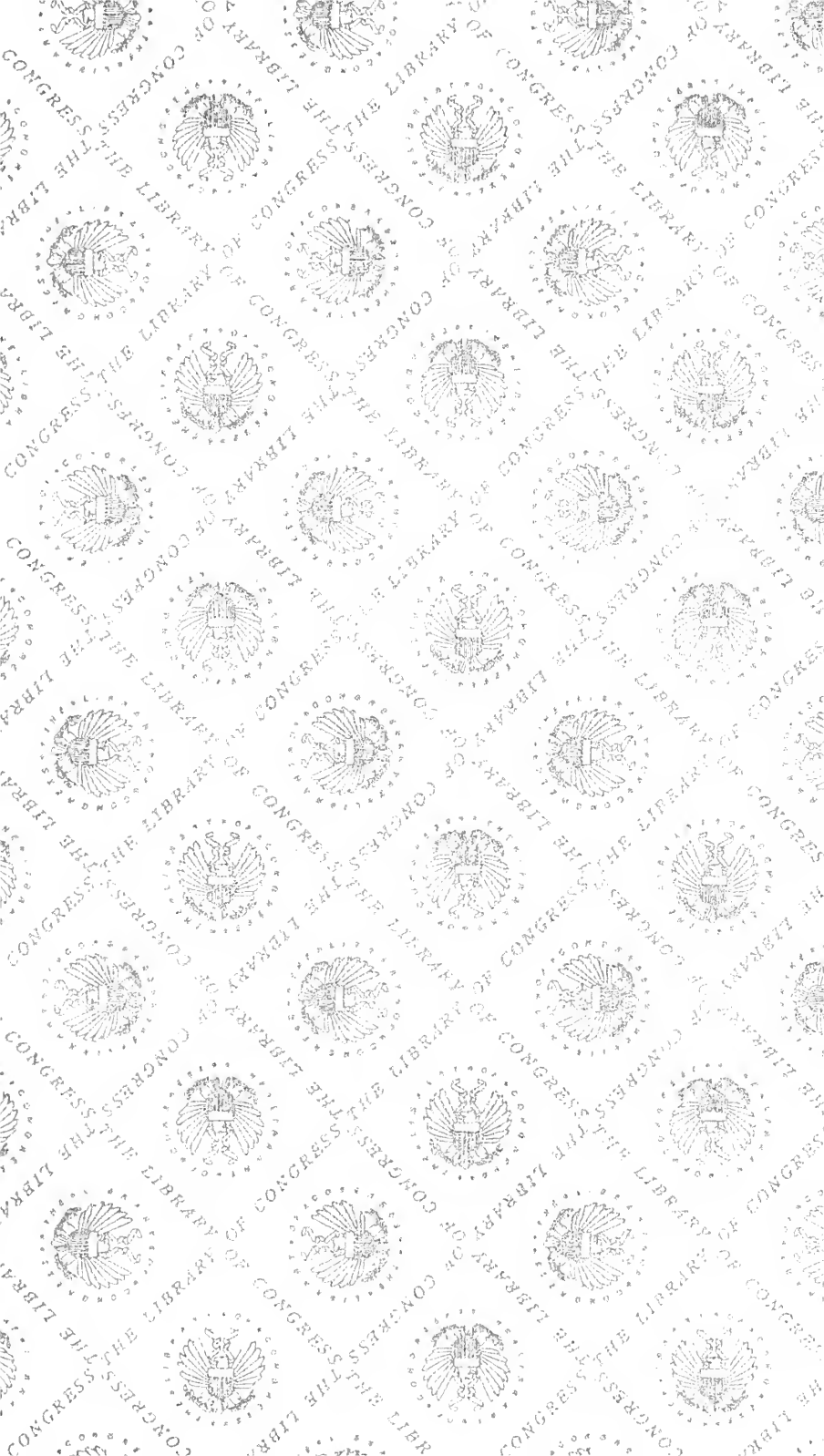
.H648

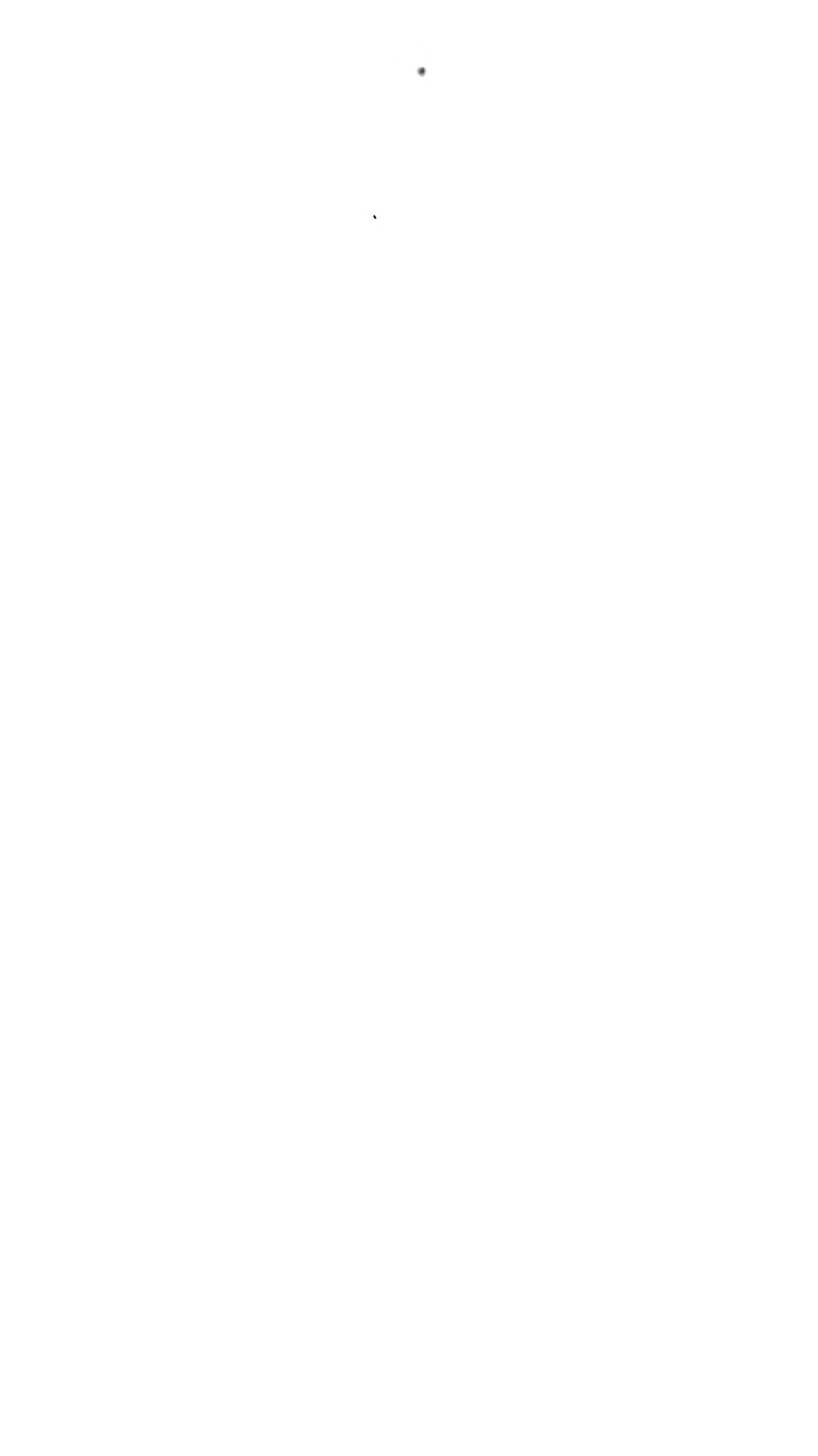
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

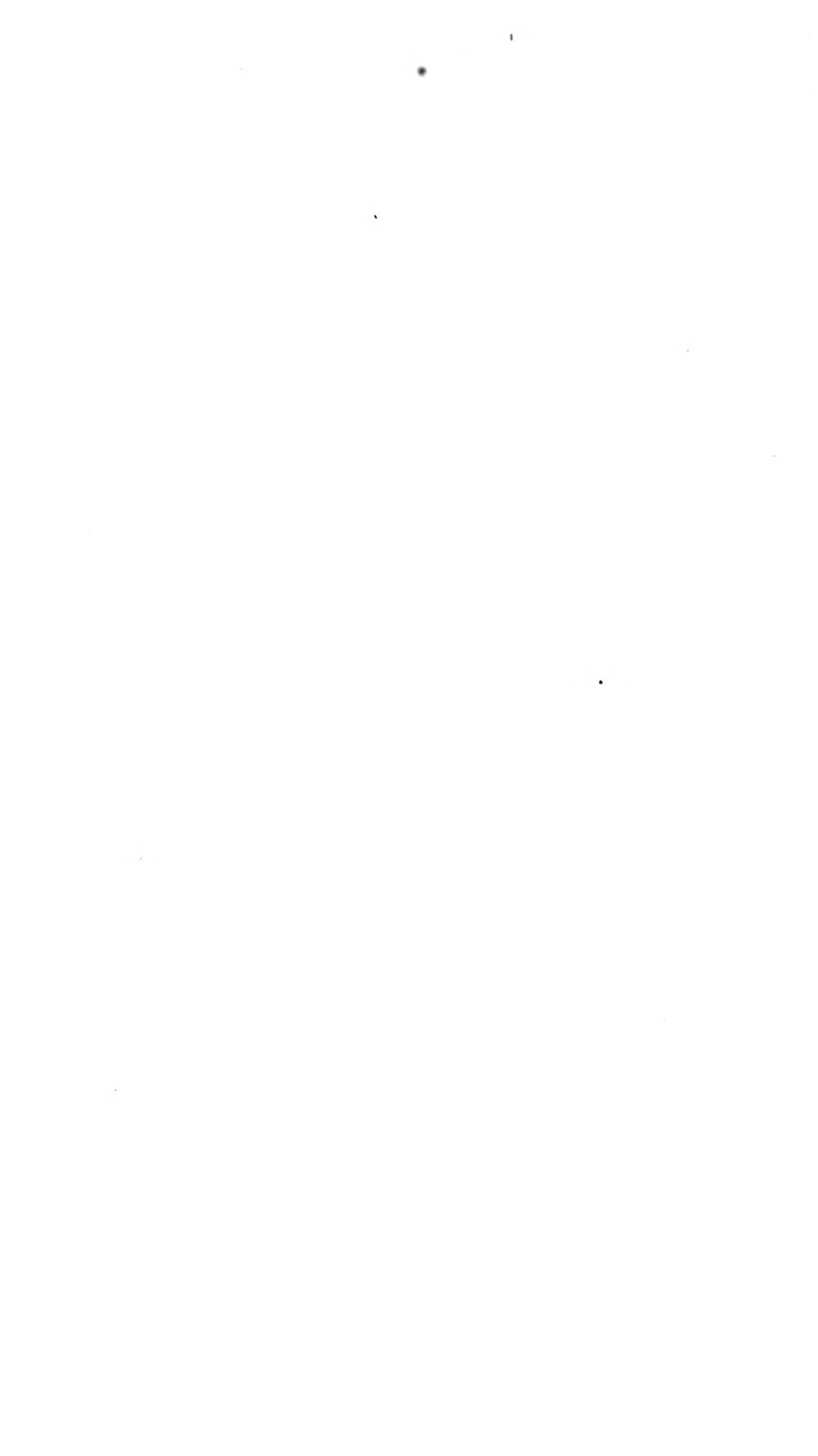


00006213649











AN ORATION,

DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL OF

THE COLUMBIAN COLLEGE,

ON 22d OF FEBRUARY, 1830

BY ▲ MEMBER OF

THE ENOSINIAN SOCIETY.

John T. Alden

Optimum est majorem sequi, si recte præcesserint.—Cic.

WASHINGTON CITY:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM GREER.

1830.

E 312
.63
.H648

NATIONAL GLORY.

Mankind have ever been characterised by an honorable desire of lasting fame: this active spirit has led to the most illustrious achievements, and will always remain a prime mover to national glory.

The glory of a people does not consist in a dense population, spread over a widely extended territory: England ranks among the proudest nations, while China, with all her crowded cities and peopled deserts, scarcely finds a commemorative page.

Still less can the majestic stream, and snow covered mountain, snatch from oblivion the land of barbarism. The sun gilds the Andes as brightly as he does the Appenines; the extended Amazon rolls its waves with the silvery radiance that graces the meandering Thames; but the fair sun of science enlivens not the wild scenery of the Andes, nor displays the wings of commerce upon the heaving Amazon.

Nor can the paths of slaughter and the tide of conquest constitute national glory. Bajaret and Tamerlane gloried in the roar of battle, rode on the whirlwind of destruction, and wrote their proud names in blood. But sunk in oblivion are their deeds of valor and romantic actions, like splendid meteors that once illumined the heavens amid the gloom of night. But that land is truly glorious, where sacred patriotism animates each soul, and where each bosom feels,

“That wanting virtue, life is pain and woe,
That wanting liberty, e’en virtue mourns,
And looks around for happiness in vain.”

Such was the foundation on which was reared the stupendous glory of Greece. Her sons, long buried in the grossest mists of superstition, began to emerge from barbarism, and to perceive that not in the lap of sensual indulgences, nor in the halls of brutal luxury, was man designed to act, but in nobler scenes, where virtue and reason shed their choicest gifts, and fame displayed her brightest charms.

Her green clad hills and sunny vales, no longer echoed the savage scream and the broken numbers of warlike minstrels, which now were melted into softer measures. An Orpheus strung his lyre, and the murmuring woods were hushed. Her

Homer's reed poured forth its melody, and an admiring nation caught the magic strain. Fired by the sound, her valiant spirits glowed with patriotic flame; impassioned eloquence burst from their lips, and while the clashing armour rang with horrid discord, they still were mindful of their country's fame. A glorious cause ensures a glorious success; victory shone upon her marshalled hosts; affrighted nations trembled on their shores, whenever a Grecian fleet, as a spirit of destruction, appeared on their defenceless coasts. The chrystal cave, the moss grown rock, no longer formed the habitations of man, but were the favorite retreats of rustic bards, who strove around these deserted dwellings to catch the inspiration of their former lords. Splendid cities, teeming with wealth, then reared their spires in fervent gratitude towards those heavens whence they derived their glories. Magnificent temples rose in every wood, by every murmuring stream, and told of signal blessings and of grateful hearts. Piety, virtue, and adoration, diffused their genial influence throughout society, and Greece awhile presented a bright picture of national glory.

But as the wintry storms and whirlwinds wild,
Drive fiercest far against the loftiest pile;
As heaven's red lightnings wreath their vivid arms
Around the crested mountain top, and rend
Crag, vallies, solid rocks, in ruin wide.
So, in her zenith, sunk the brightest gem
That graced the garland of humanity.

Unhallowed ambition, too frequently the offspring of refined luxury, insinuated itself in her heroes' bosoms, and those fair regions, where "dove-eyed" peace and plenty dwelt, were deluged with the blood of their own inhabitants.

Yet Greece stands not the sole victim of corrupt desires. Imperious Rome pursued the tide of conquest, and the whole habitable world fell under her subjection. Her Scipios ranged the battle field, and victory crowned their efforts. Her Cicero hurled the thunders of eloquence from her Forum, and vicious conquerors trembled. Her Virgil courted the Epic muse, and divinest strains of sublimity flowed in his awful verse. But enervating luxury soon tainted the morals of Rome and she lay exposed to the boundless lust of the first invader. Aspirants to imperial authority were not slow in presenting themselves, and before the people could shake off their lethargy, tyrannic rule was scourging them with all its horrors.

"First from their flattered Cæsars this began."

Around those plains where once the fervent lay of gratitude arose, the wail of oppressed humanity is heard. Magnificent temples, erected by the piety of ancient heroes, sacred fanes, whence the awfully inspiring notes of prophecy commanded a free people to assert their country's rights, now mouldering, lie a sad example of the instability of earthly grandeur, or what is doubly painful, ring with the shouts of brutal slaves, dead to all sensibility.

What would you say, ye noble ones of Greece, ye spirits of Marathon, could ye rise from the hallowed tomb, and behold your scenes of triumph polluted by tyrants' footsteps?

"What would you say, ye conquerors of earth?

Ye Romans! Could you raise the laurelled head,

and view the laud where once your glories shone, now lost to honor and to fame?

Could even a moment's reflection tell you the glory you have resigned, degenerate race of religious bigotry! Ye would tear the garlands from your brows, and bewail your lost condition. Victims of oppression! Could but the memory of departed splendor awaken them to their true situation. Could the fire that glowed in their ancestors' bosoms but warm their torpid feelings; no more would the voice of tyranny be heard on their shores; but the animating notes of freedom would again resound in their temples, and their classic mountains echo once more the glad voice of a hardy yeomanry.

Black is the gloom which overspreads their horizon. Hard and mighty are the chains in which they are bound. Ignorance and superstition brood in death-like shade over their ruins of departed glory; and bigotry, their never failing attendant, chills the growth of every liberal sentiment.

A nation can be styled glorious only when virtue and piety are its grand characteristics. When these predominate in the different classes of society, then the end proposed by each person is the public happiness. Noble indeed, and truly generous, is the character of that people, which, actuated by virtue, rejects all pampered magnificence, and applies itself exclusively to those pursuits which render a country prosperous at home, respected and venerated abroad. In individuals ruled by patriotic principles, we find much to esteem and admire. But when millions, inspired by the same feelings, unite in forming one grand fabric, regulated by generous laws, all operating towards one beneficial effect, the mind is lost in admiration. This is truly an enchanting picture, which "to be" valued, "needs but to be seen." Its intrinsic beauty has seldom been ascertained by actual demon-

stration. It exists but too generally in the imagination, and has never yet appeared in its utmost splendor. There are, however, many different degrees of proximation towards this perfection, and Greece and Rome must certainly be allowed to have gained the highest elevation among the nations of antiquity. Other nations flourished before and after them, but their prosperity was as the glittering bubble, transient and fading away. No talented historian flourished there to transmit to his classic page the wondrous exploits of his countrymen. No discriminating philosopher there penetrated the mysteries of nature, and explored the latent stores of science. No child of nature there poured forth strains of subduing eloquence before an admiring auditory. But the hand of oppression enchained the genius of man, and the lays of the muses' friend, warbled alone the savage deeds of the tyrant.

The native land of song, the land of impassioned eloquence, and the abode of philosophy, must be the home of freedom. Where tyranny spreads its baneful influence, the whole moral world becomes tainted. Genius, despised and neglected, is not simply left to bear the hardships of a laborious existence, but is often chilled and persecuted by despotic sway. Such was the state of degraded Greece; such was the condition of imperial Rome, when absolute authority involved her in errors more hopeless far than those which misled her unpolished founders. Revolutions seldom move backwards. This is a truth which history realizes in its brightest colors, and in its blackest shades. A rising nation, cemented by the strongest ties of patriotism, adorned by virtuous spirits, and celebrated as the abode of justice, presents a picture too beautiful to be contrasted with its subsequent history. There is a rising prosperity, which every kingdom, empire, and republic, may enjoy from age to age, but from which it must assuredly decline whenever restraint is removed from the passions of ambitious spirits. The strength, the influence, and the glory of a nation, depend mainly upon the choice of its rulers; for its laws, of themselves, can avail nothing. There must be a skilful virtuous guide at the head of government. There must be punctuality and sterling principles in its officers, or like the disabled bark, it must drive inevitably on the fatal shores of anarchy, and be involved in the appalling horrors of a civil war.

Virtue has been denominated by the wisest legislators the essence of liberty! Or why the generous laws which unite the inhabitants of every country in the sacred bands of filial devotion

to their common parent? In ancient history bright mementos of her divine influence exist; brilliant pictures, of virtue's own coloring, charm the mental vision. Let us dwell on the bright prospect in all its unsullied splendor; nor dart the gaze of inspection upon the mournful sequel. Heavenly in herself, captivating in her native charms, virtue shines in conscious pride, nor needs the odious character of vice, by hateful contrast, to set off her beauty. The mind which contemplates the true nature of virtuous principles, becomes refined and pure as the evening cloud, and soaring far above the mists of ignorance, rests upon immortal good. Such is their influence on individuals, and may it ever be the glory of our countrymen. The possession of the richest and most elevated source of enjoyment, is the privilege of those, who, charmed by the inspiration of heaven-born freedom, rise superior to the impulses of ambition, and light the torch of liberty at the shrine of virtue. They are the guardian spirits which hover around us when the fury of civil commotion threatens our concord, and in awe of which the sullen tempest retires. Amid the tumultuous storm of party rage, their bright examples shine as ocean beacons, and guide the political bark through blackening shades, to the peaceful shores of calm prosperity. But to enjoy the greatest benefit from their influence, virtue must actuate the desires of every individual. The virtuous man sacrifices his own interest at the altar of his country's good. Those generous feelings which adorn his breast, form a hallowed throne, where the rights of his countrymen reign in blissful security. Never will sordid motives, or the prejudices of partizan feelings, induce him to swerve from the paths of uprightness, and to acquire an empty fame, at the expense of his peace.

The value of their principles is readily seen in the early history of our own country. If then while a dark cloud lowered over our political horizon, the same vices had sullied our character which plunged France in terrific confusion, liberty must have spurned our shores, and resigned them to despotic sway; tyranic rule must have scourged us again, and our dearly bought privileges have been wrested from us. Nothing but the purest virtue could have swayed the souls of our countrymen to discard all personal advancement, and to consult only the good of the community.

May Americans ever remember that their free institutions are the rewards which Heaven bestows on suffering Virtue.

May they ever be reminded, that though the charter of their liberties be engraven on the wildest rocks and their institution

based more firmly than the aerial cliff, still as the driving whirlwind twists the eternal granite from its bed and convulsive nature yawns beneath the tottering mountain, so can the withering grasp of vice pollute the fairest liberty and plunge the noblest government blighted in the abyss of degradation.

From contemplating their own blissful condition let them turn to revolutionary France. Behold the maddening rage of licentious mobs kindling every bosom. Behold them toiling for an empty name! For Liberty! Let not her sacred name be so polluted! Let not a raging thirst of conquest be styled patriotism! Despotism robed in the embroidery of freedom lured them onward to destruction! They admired the gay trappings of prosperous Liberty, but secured in fields of blood a darker inheritance than before.

Here freedom's genius pauses, and laments
Upon the mouldering tombs of slaughtered sons.
And as oppression drives his thundering car,
Amid the dismal scene, t' insult her woes,
Kissing the hallowed dust of those she loved,
Looks up and drops a tear.

Here may our countrymen pause, and catch the prophetic sounds which swell around the graves of political fanatics, and which proclaim, in all the majesty of death, the ruin that attends a vitiated cause.

Dark and mournful too is the state of Spain. Powerful indeed is the arm of oppression, which is bared against her dearest rights. Profound is the slumber in which she has been sunk for ages. Religious gloom stamps its horrors upon the very springs of her councils, and the fatal poison lurks in every vein. She too rose from her obscurity, and poured, awhile, bright rays upon the morning of freedom; but the opening that admitted these gleams of hope, glared for a moment in the summit of perfection, then closed in all the aggravated gloom of returning darkness. Vice and ignorance are too firmly established in her dominions for the light of liberty to gain the ascendancy. The habits of her people proclaim her unfit for the precious boon. America, then, is the last clime in which the "mountain goddess" chooses to dwell. Driven from Europe, she has visited our shores, and taken her last most glorious stand. Then be it ours to defend her, be it our most solemn duty to practise those virtues which most conduce to her permanent residence.

Poetry and history, though generally considered as mere amusements, necessary to the relaxation of the mind, are endowed with more astonishing powers than we at first imagine. Here is

embodied all the greatness and chivalry of former ages. Stamped by the magic impress of genius, the flowing verse, and classic page, revive the grand recollections of departed worth, and the enraptured soul dwells at once in silent wonder upon the united glories of former times. What Homer sang, the martial patriot burns to achieve; and what Tacitus described, the generous spirit strives to imitate.

Poetry and history, then, are boundless fields of pleasure, where the imagination lays aside its dross, and mingles all refinement, with the spirit of ages past. The patriotic soul is transported to the land where Hector fought, is wafted to the passes of Thermopylæ, and glows anew with redoubled ardor around the tomb of Leonidas. Inspired by the pleasing spell, the poet's fancy kindles with divine emulation, and in his rapturous notes, the soul of freedom breathes its loftiest strains. Here eloquence receives the fervid glow, and acquires that powerful influence which subdues the will, and charms the soul to tenderness. Where is a nation's glory when the memorials of patriotism are extinct? Without the monumental pile, and the sacred lay of victory, the voice of fame is buried in oblivion, and the nobler feelings of the soul lie hushed in slumber. But when the sublime strain of splendid achievements bursts from the poet's muse, when deeds of valor and fierce encounters in defence of virtue awake the sounding lyre, heavenly patriotism inspires the coldest hearts, and cowardice itself is brave.

Fortified by such sentiments, the soldier exchanges the smiles of dearest friends, for the streaming glare and horrid crash of arms.

What bosom is not warmed by the tale of its country's glory? What soul is not kindled with rage, when it hears the narrative of its country's wrongs? That bosom, that soul cannot bear the impress of humanity, it is cold and impenetrable as the adamantine rock.

Such feelings Pindar's lyre awakened in Grecian breasts; such was the fire which animated each Roman bosom, when Ennius sung his country's victories; and cannot our own country boast of generous deeds? Her morning has dawned in splendor. Her maiden glories are not the meretricious colors of successful prowess. But her light is the favoring smile of heaven. The Eternal One has stamped our origin with a brighter impress than e'er has graced a country's rise. Two centuries ago, these smiling plains were buried in an endless waste. Around these plains where plenty reigns with sweet content, the howling wolf mocked the war-whoop of the ferocious savage.

But the spirit of freedom which glowed in our ancestors' bosoms, exalted them to that proud station whence they could view unmoved, the storms of adversity, and smile upon misfortune's gathering frowns. When the snows and storms of winter drove keenly on their humble cabins; while disease and death continually met their view; when no friend was near to soothe the afflicted heart, and pour the balm of consolation, what else than the holy fire of liberty could have cheered and sustained their hopes. Heaven breathed into their souls the sacred flame, and kept it alive to proclaim the approach of a dazzling luminary. Vainly the tempest beat, and famine raged. No earthly power could quench the rising blaze, fed by Omnipotence, and destined to illumine the world. The forest echo no longer mocked the murdering howl, but the busy hum of industry awakened every scene to cheerfulness.

Our ancient foes, whose deadly hate and rancorous spite had chilled the blood of thousands, were taught by dire experience to reverence that powerful civilization, which once they proudly contemned. Now plenty poured her choicest blessings on our happy fields, and a benignant sky rewarded to profusion the labors of the colonist. But virtuous freedom, feelingly alive to all the sensibilities of the soul, could ill brook the unjust restraints which tyranny ever chooses to impose. Neglected and left alone to bear the toils and hardships of early colonization, yet sorely oppressed, when prosperity diffused her cheering radiance, the sons of freedom roused from repose the quiescent sparks of liberty, and kindled that brilliant light which now shines upon astonished man.

Scarcely fifty years have elapsed since the star of freedom rose upon our western world; since the fair beams of science and literature dawned upon our shores.

But as the lowering storm that blurred the sky,
With brighter splendor paints the morning rays,
So from our shores the shades of darkness fly,
And learning shines in one resplendent blaze.

Ushered into celebrity with the dawn of their country's glory, a host of exalted worthies began their career in the different departments of philosophy, history, and song. Immortal Franklin attempted the sublime speculations of electricity, and sported with the lightnings of Heaven. Revolving worlds and remotest systems formed the pleasing contemplation of Rittenhouse, and in the fervid strains of youthful Paine, inspiring poetry breathed its richest melody. In eloquence, our land is immortalized by

the wonderful powers of her Ames, her Henry, and Hamilton; names that must ever be mentioned with delight, whose love of oratory animates a single bosom. We are accused, it is true, of blindly admiring our native talent, and of national vanity, while undistinguished in the literary world. Let foreign despots vent their spleen, but American hearts, so long as patriotism lives, can swell in fervent gratitude. We are charged with building our literary fame upon the spoils of transatlantic treasure. We are accused of echoing the melody of exalted bards on England's classic shore. We acknowledge the fault, if that can be styled a fault in a youthful nation, to admire the noblest picture of humanity. Let England traduce our character, and long for our downfall, but if the flame of learning, kindled on her shores, could eclipse the glories of cotemporary nations, and approach the lofty height of ancient literature, with what splendor must our meridian glow, when our dawning glory already displays such transcendent brilliancy.

The want of an elevated national literature has been styled a serious defect in the glory of our country. The diffusion of useful knowledge has always been the summit of perfection, to which our distinguished personages aspire, as more conducive to the prosperity of their country. The fate of ancient republics was considered a solemn warning of the dangerous consequences resulting from the introduction of this refined madness. But when was Greece more enlightened and free than in the golden era of her literature? When were more exalted sentiments cherished in pagan Rome, than in her noon-day splendor? When the thunders of eloquence silenced the murmurs of sedition, and hushed the tempest of faction in general tranquility. When a corrupted populace listened with admiration to the doctrines of patriotic sages, inculcating the precious tenets of virtuous liberty. Let not Americans shun the fair paths and flowers of literature, as dangerous rocks on which their institutions may perish. Let them rather turn, and behold with horror, the fatal poison which lurks in the dregs of ignorance, and which, if ever fomented, must corrode the springs of our existence.

We all profess to be enamoured of virtue in her simple charms. How captivating ought she then to appear, when clad in the brightest robes of inspiration, and arrayed in beauties, which teach even slaves respect and admiration. Let not the effusions of virtuous spirits be regarded as noon-day dreams of the soul, or meretricious colorings of idle fancy, and that rich treasure, delivered to us by our ancestors, will be enshrined in our hearts.

and virtue, rejoicing in her precious charge, shall hand it down to posterity in increasing splendor. Then will the metropolis of our empire be an imperishable monument of our fame. Then will our seat of empire be a fountain of literary glory, whence remote regions of our country shall receive the enriching stream, and reflect the blaze of renown in unsullied light. Let then the sacred flame be kindled in our capital. Let the tide of glory originate in the hearts of our rulers, and the divine fervor will be instilled in the affections of our countrymen, and every bosom burn with emulation. Reposing under the patronage of government, knowledge, useful and ornamental, will flourish; future patriots, kindling with youthful flame, shall catch the glow of inspiration at the altar of science, and hang with raptures on the strains of future Hamiltons.

A glorious prospect lies before us. The fields of learning and science, blooming in unparalleled beauty, and open to our view, invite us to revel in their paths and reap a rich reward. Fair science smiles upon our noble birth, and lofty themes are ours to employ the pen of genius. Then let us appreciate the precious boon, let every bosom burn with ardor, and at no remote period, America will take her appropriate station, as the adorning gem of the universe, and the fountain of ennobling literature. Then in the pages of some future Livy will the deeds of our pride be told. Then will each patriotic bosom be fired with holy zeal, when in the verses of some future Homer, the praise of righteous liberty shall be repeated. When years unnumbered shall have swelled the tide of time; when happy millions shall have filled the wide regions of the west, and crowned our snowy mountains with the smiles of industry; then shall the patriot bard, kneeling at the altar of liberty, by Bunker's hallowed mount, pour forth a thrilling strain, that shall be echoed o'er the vast expanse, and be hushed only in the Pacific's roar.

Clad in rays of immortality, our departed father could then smile with delight upon those plains where oft he drank the cup of bitterness, supported and sustained by Heaven. If, then, his glorious shade could burst the bands of death, and survey the ripening scenes on which his mortal cares were all bestowed; if, then, he could behold his loved Columbia diffusing her radiant splendor over the nations of earth, that single view would compensate him for all his arduous toils, and confer an immortality of bliss.

But he is not forever gone. The soul of Washington, veiled by the mantle of death, still warms each patriot breast,

Maintains its splendor, as the summer sun
Pours through the misty cloud his golden ray





